

CHAPTER V

THE INVASION OF ITALY

THE tragic end of his old colleague must have raised many disquieting thoughts in the mind of Diocletian, already beginning to be anxious lest his successors should think that he was living too long. While Galerius flourished he was sure of a protector, but Galerius died in 311. In the eighteenth year of his rule he had been stricken with an incurable and loathsome malady, into the details of which Lactantius enters with a morbid but lively enjoyment, affecting to see in the torture of the dying Emperor the visitation of an angry Providence. He describes minutely the progress of the cancer and the "appalling odour of the festering wound which spread not only through the palace but through the city." He shews us the unhappy patient raising piercing cries and calling for mercy from the God of the Christians whom he had persecuted, vowing under the stress of physical anguish that he would make reparation; and, finally, when at the very point of death (*jam deficiens*), dictating the edict which stayed the persecution and gave the Christians full liberty to